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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: VOTER REGISTRATION KICK-OFF LIKELY TO LOWER
CONFIDENCE AND RAISE TENSIONS

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for reasons 1.4 (B)
and (D)

(C) SUMMARY: After months of promises by INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu that the 2006 voter's registration process would be a technological, procedural and logistical upgrade from previous exercises, it is fast becoming apparent that INEC is woefully unprepared for registering the country's estimated 65 million voters. With a severe shortage of data capture machines, incompatible software and lack of training on usage of the new machines, the exercise is likely to further damage the credibility of INEC and raise legitimate questions about adequate preparations for elections in April 2007. END SUMMARY.

¶1. (C) Concern is mounting over the technical preparations for elections. The Senate is scheduled to convene a special hearing on INEC's preparations on October 11. A number of National Assembly members have expressed concern to us about the overall process, as well as the quality and quantity of data capture machines. Memories of INEC's failed efforts in 2003 to upgrade the registration process to include biometric data, contribute to current skepticism. In order to address the swirling controversy surrounding the exercise, Prof. Iwu is scheduled to conduct a briefing, restricted to invited Ambassadors only, on October 6.

¶2. (U) Further fueling skepticism among a broad range of political actors, INEC continues to suffer from logistical, financial and operational difficulties. After much fanfare, INEC announced in September that it would begin a rolling nationwide registration exercise. Less than a month later, quietly, INEC announced it would instead begin to register voters in a dozen isolated communities in a handful of states. INEC also announced that a 20 billion naira check written against the organization's funds in the Central Bank, had bounced. The check would have covered operating and equipment expenses, although INEC spokesman attempted to down play the impact of the bounced check.

¶3. (C) Newspaper reports indicate the check bounced because the bank determined that the machines were invoiced at twice the normal cost. This same allegation was also privately communicated to Poloff by a representative of the American company which was bidding to supply the machines. The representative left Abuja discouraged by the level of corruption in the procurement process.

¶4. (C) Comment: In a political environment tainted by a recent history of corrupt and questionable elections, and now opaque with political uncertainty, INEC is seen as a bellweather of political will. Instances of lofty promises, soon broken, factual clarifications, later proved false, corruption and lack of technical preparedness (such as the voter registration exercise in Abuja) are viewed through the prism of political intentions. In this fluid and unpredictable environment, institutional confidence is a

commodity in short supply, and everything INEC does to diminish its limited stock affects much more than the technical preparations for elections.

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